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TG25747

Assignment 6

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734 Words

AN UNSUNG HERO

"To Arms! , To Arms!!, the War has begun!!!" This rallying cry, accompanied by the sound of galloping hoofbeats, marked the beginning of the American Revolution. A unit of British soldiers had fired on a small band of American Colonial militia, without provocation, killing six and wounding four. This occurred at the North Bridge, over the Concord River near Lexington, Massachusetts at daybreak, Wednesday, April 19, 1775.

It was imperative that this news be spread throughout the Colonies, so that troops could be mustered. The Committee of Safety at Watertown, Massachusetts prepared a document to be carried across New England and on to New York and Philadelphia, the centers of the Colonial government. Because messages were often lost because of the capture or carelessness of the messengers, this matter demanded very special care: One courier, Paul Revere, had ridden to warn Samuel Adams and John Hancock, and also alert the Lexington Minutemen. Along with two other riders, Billy Dawes and Samuel Prescott, he headed to Concord , Massachusetts. Unfortunately six British Regulars captured

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Revere and Dawes. Revere covered less than twenty miles, although Longfellow's poem about his famous ride brought him much renown. Longfellow penned his verses eighty years after the event!

Another rider became a truly unsung hero at this time. Israel Bissell, a 23-year old post rider between Boston and New York, was selected for the dangerous mission. He was known to be an enthusiastic patriot, familiar with the roads and people along the route. He faced the challenge of riding along roads closely guarded by the British and their Tory allies. This resulted in frequent beatings of the messengers, and the seizing of messages. Only a fearless, expert rider could hope to accomplish the feat and Bissell met these qualifications.

Carrying his precious document, Bissell left Watertown about 10:00 A.M., while the battle was still in progress. The history of Worcester County, Massachusetts records that a horseman, dusty and weary with hard riding, galloped into town about noon, shouting that the war had begun. He didn't even have to rein in his white horse. It fell dead, bloodied with spurring and spent with fatigue. Horse and rider had covered thirty miles in just two hours. Preparations for defense began as the alarm rang out from the steeple of the meeting house.

The message Bissell carried specified that "all persons are desired to furnish him with fresh horses, as they may be needed". He rode relentlessly on, through tiny hamlets of weathered salt-box houses, on to towns and cities, stopping only long enough for his message to be copied, while he managed a quick meal. He rode on day and night, cold and

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bone-weary, along trails made slippery by Spring thaws and occasional icy patches. Leaf buds were barely swelling on the maples, oaks and elms. Silent evergreens fringed many miles of his tireless journey. He stayed a few hours in New Haven, Connecticut on Friday night and left the next morning,, refreshed by his first real rest since Wednesday morning. How good a bed must have felt after all those hours in a saddle!

Bissell continued across Connecticut, and arrived at a coffee house in Wall Street in New York (City) at noon Sunday, April 23rd. He left at 4:00 P.M., after his message had been copied by the chairman of the Committee on Correspondence. At last, the disheveled and exhausted rider reached his final destination of Philadelphia, 345 miles from Watertown. Israel Bissell had covered this distance in just under five days (He rode seventeen times further than Paul Revere). At that time, stage coaches took six to nine days for the journey, according to the season of the year. Other post riders then took the news from Philadelphia as far as the southernmost colony of Georgia, rousing troops to join the fight.

After his remarkable ride, Bissell joined the army and fought with distinction to the end of the war. He later married and farmed at Partridgefield, Massachusetts. Israel Bissell takes his final rest in a tiny cemetery in Hinsdale, Massachusetts. He lies beneath a weathered stone slab that bears the inscription: "In Memory of Israel Bissell who died October 24, 1823, aged seventy-one years".

There is no special marker on the grave of this great patriot, who served a vital part in freeing the American Colonies from British Rule. However the members of the Hinsdale Grange gather each year to honor his memory.